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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAHORE 000309

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: BLASTS MAR INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL EVENT IN LAHORE

CLASSIFIED BY: Clinton Taylor, Acting Principal Officer,  
Consulate Lahore, U.S. Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: Three small blasts at an international cultural festival in Lahore November 24 injured two persons; no Americans were injured. The Punjab police arrested one suspect, a 16-year-old Afghan worker. Although no group has taken credit, most commentators speculated that the explosions were the work of those who disapproved of western dance/music performances and connected the incident to early October blasts at three juice shops known as meeting places for unmarried couples. End Summary.

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Blasts Disrupt Cultural Event  
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12. (SBU) Three low-intensity explosions between 2200 and 2215 on the night of November 22 at the Punjab Arts and Language Center (also known as Punjabi Complex) and the Alhamra Cultural Complex at Gaddafi Stadium disrupted the second-to-last night of the annual World Performing Arts Festival. Three people were injured in the blast. Although no group has taken credit for the explosions, the police arrested a 13-year-old Afghan boy who arrived with his schoolbag, according to the police. Six others were also detained, according to news sources. Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, attending the performance, safely fled after the second blast. Although the festival involved performers from 85 countries, no Americans were injured.

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Police Say Firecrackers Caused the Blast  
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13. (C) Although initial reports indicated that a timing devices were found on the scene, police told our FSN November 24 that a one-kilogram and two half-kilogram firecrackers caused the blasts. The supposed timing components came from wiring that came out of the wall, he continued. Although just firecrackers, the detonations caused physical damage to the building, shattered several windows and injured three people, news correspondents pointed out. Festival organizers told our FSN that they received no threats before or after the blasts, and said that the police provided adequate, "vigilant" security. Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, who had just returned from China, condemned the blasts November 23 and pledged to protect Punjab's citizens.

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October Juice Shop Blasts Related?  
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14. (C) Several observers related the November 22 blasts to the three October 7 bombs that exploded at juice shops near Old Lahore that seriously injured five bystanders. The tall booths

in the juice shops provided a place for unmarried couples to meet surreptitiously. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Khawaja Imran Nazir told poloff November 24 that "these fanatics don't like places where the genders mix." Moreover, he continued, they object to dancing, as reflected officially in a recent High Court ruling against public dance performances. Naveed Chaudhry, member of the Local Governmnet Commission in Punjab and former Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Information Secretary, thought that the perpetrators sought to discourage entertainment. Former Information and Broadcasting Minister Khalid Khan Kharan intoned that "this is just the beginning" of the end of cultural performances in Punjab.

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Comment: Mischief Could Slide Into Terrorism

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15. (C) The three November 22 blasts, coming after the October 7 juice shop bombs, prolong a disturbing trend in Lahore that targets public performances and meeting places. Regardless of whether the same group perpetrated the two incidents, they have generated uncertainty in a cosmopolitan city known for its rich cultural history.

TAYLOR